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No. 224.

EXTRACT of a LETTER

FROM

A LADY in COLCHESTER to her FRIEND in TOWN.

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BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

Extract of a Letter, &c.

—BESIDES, my Dear, this town (bad as it may ever ſeem to you) is, I aſſure you, grown much worſe, being at laſt, from a place of tolerable gaiety for a town of trade, degenerated into downright dullneſs and ſtupidity; there being now hardly a ſingle creature in it capable of a rational entertainment. Cards and dice fill up the mighty void, and engroſs the whole day and night. Nay, there is not even a common weaver's wife, now-a-days, but what has her petty rout, or drum minor. And, as to the better ſort, (if you will allow me the expreſſion) they are totally immers'd in this too faſhionable folly, I may ſay vice.

Indeed, there are but few here calculated for ſociety or converſation, ſo that I ſuffer but little on that account. But what makes me ſtark ſtaring mad is, that,

on

on entrance into any houſe, you are inſtantly uſhered into a back room, and there, *ſans ceremonie*, fixed to a card-table, amongſt a ſet of fuſty, avaricious old matrons, and battered half-bred beaus, who, though we never play for more than three-pence a fiſh at Quadrille, often a penny, are as earneſt, and quarrelſome, as if they had no other pin-money than what they culled out at cards; or their whole livelihood depended on Spadille, Manille, Baſto: nay, I believe this to be nearly the caſe with moſt of them, unleſs it be here and there a dirty baize-maker's wife, who values herſelf on a little money got by oppreſſion, and luck in trade, which enables her to ride in a coach, drawn by two *ſwitch-tail* horſes; who, inſtead of her own and huſband's name in a cypher, which is the only ſubſtitute for want of arms, might have a loom between three wool-packs, ſupported by two paupers, and a laniger for a creſt, with this ſignificant motto, *Senſus abeſt*; which, by the bye, I leave you to explain.

But, to return to the gamblers. What with their dextrous management of the pool (which each claims a right to at her own houſe) and a frequent ſiniſter ſhuffle, at which they are all very expert, one ſeldom comes away from theſe harpies for leſs than ten or twelve ſhillings at a ſitting.

What a proſtitution of time and money is this! We have, indeed, a monthly aſſembly, and, thanks be to the neighbouring

neighbouring gentry for their appearance now and then at it, or even that would degenerate into a mere children's ball; there being ſeldom one now, that is not more than half made up of little maſters from ſchool, and young miſſes, that have ſcarce left off their leading-ſtrings. But I muſt not omit to inform you of one thing that carries with it the appearance of gaiety and pleaſure, which is, an humble imitation of a concert here once a fortnight; a laughable, burleſque affair, I aſſure you; ſomething inferior to the orcheſtra of a ſet of barn-playing comedians, where two or three infamous tormentors of catgut (particularly from the neighbourhood of Dedham) meet together to amuſe and entertain

" Our dotard C——r; mankind's diſgrace!
" Whoſe wife late *Shot* him, of plebeian race;
" His gold the only merit he could claim;
" The only *thing* expected by the dame.
" To cenſure others' conduct, baſely prone,
" Nor caſts one ſpare reflection on his own.
" Product of oil, pomatum, powder, ſoap,
" Begot, conceiv'd, born, bred up without hope:"

Who, if he had ever travelled beyond the ſmoak of his own chimney, I ſhould have thought had been bit by a Tarantula; as it is not the quality, but the quantity, of muſic, that principally pleaſes him; ſound, not harmony, that he is in any degree capable of reliſhing.

And

And I own I wiſh ſome of his friends, (if he has any) would perſuade him to be as frugal of his joints of meat and puddings, as he, and the other *great light* of this town, are of their lamp-oil; who never ſuffer their lamps to be lighted above one quarter of the year, and then not on moon-light nights, (for they are all lunatics) and only from duſk to bed-time, eleven o'clock. I wiſh, I ſay, ſome one would perſuade him to a cheaper method of entertaining himſelf, by procuring two or three young pigs, which might be dragged into his room by their tails, there to ſqueak with a book of concertos before them, till his muſical fit was over. This, I am convinced, would not only anſwer every purpoſe, with reſpect to his ear, but, as there might be ſome got to ſqueak in uniſon, ſo would it be far preferable than that jargon of ſounds produced by an unſkilful draw of a harſh-roſin'd bow acroſs a *baſe* fiddle. Thus much for our Colcheſter amuſements. Now for our diſtreſſes, which, I aſſure you are very great. One of which I cannot help grieving at exceedingly; and that is, that the dear Norwich company of players are come here, for the laſt time, being determined to quit a theatre where only

" Drunkards and noiſy blades, run up and down,
" And ſilver-ticket gentry of the town;
" Where nought but baize-makers, the Devil's proxies,
" Crowd on each ſeat, and fill throughout the boxes,
" Clapping, or hiſſing-off, to pleaſe their doxies.

" Where

" Where ruſtick genii fill the gaping pit,
" Bob-wig'd and one-curl'd parſons without wit ;
" Scriv'ners and lawyers clerks, all rang'd in order,
" And headed by the D——y R——r.
" Who love to dabble in each dirty cauſe,
" Perplex their clients, and confound the laws ;
" Thus greaſe, then ape-like grin, and lick their paws.
" And in whoſe gall'ries make a glaring ſhow,
" Weavers, and farmers ſervants from the plow,
" Of Colcheſter, the prime nobility, I vow."—

What, my dear Conſtantia, will become of us, when theſe enchanting creatures leave us ?—What a gloomy proſpect is here for the future ?—I am determined, for my part, not to ſtay long after; but to follow them, and attempt to cut a figure, in ſome character or other, rather than lead ſuch a life amongſt a pack of half-bred, purſe-proud, dull, ſtupid miſcreants,

" From weavers, tinkers, taylors, barbers, ſprung,
" Like muſhrooms riſing from the putrid dung."

One thing, I hear, which affords me real pleaſure, as I am convinced it will be productive of no ſmall fun; and that is, that a certain neighbouring gentleman has actually compleated and publiſhed a new play, called *The Baize-Makers*, a Comedy ; and an entertainment, called *The Corporation*, a Farce, with a ſuitable Prologue and Epilogue, calculated entirely for this theatre,

tre, which he intends to preſent to the players for rehearſal, if ever they come again. In which, I am told by one who has read them both, there is not a character of the leaſt note but what is moſt ſtrikingly repreſented.

" Here gouty Cerberus, with ſkin of braſs,
" Bellows aloud, and proves himſelf an aſs;
" Thinks to refine each character he ſees,
" Himſelf a hogſhead of corrupted lees.
" There's Maſter M—, whoſe head of hair would fright
" The foppiſh Frenchman, a mere ſtalking ſpright,
" 'Twixt hawk and buzzard—an hermaphrodite."

Heavens ſend we may have it! I'll certainly let you know when it is acted; do, dear creature, come and ſpend a day or two with us then, and you will give the moſt laſting and ſubſtantial joy to her who is, with the higheſt degree of affection and friendſhip,

Yours,

A LOVEJOY.

P. S. You deſired me to inform you of all deaths and marriages hereabouts. I have ſufficiently convinced you, that this whole town is dead, or dying. But had like to forgot a magnificent wedding or two,

kept

kept laſt week; people that you know very well, too. But I muſt keep you in ſuſpence a little. You know I love to teaze you. I'll tell you in my next. In the mean time, be ſatisfied with hearing that the wedding dinner was thought to be the grandeſt ever ſeen at the old folks houſe, there being, to my certain knowledge, an order ſent to town for a peck of peas, four artichoaks, two ſmall lobſters, and half a pint of ſhrimps. The whole was conducted with the greateſt ſolemnity; and a very droll ſermon preached on the occaſion, by the father of one of the ladies, the Sunday they made their appearance.

O Tempora! O Mores!

Conſtrue that, and Adieu.

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